RESTORATION REVIEW

Just as religious organizations have natural barriers to change, they also have natural tendencies toward stability and strength. These have helped to make the church one of the most enduring institutions in all of history.--*Leith Anderson*

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The Truth That Frees

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What the Old Testament Means to Us. . . No.6

THE EXILE AND THE SECOND EXODUS

Part of what I am saying about what the Old Testament means to us is that there are two pivotal events around which much of the Old Testament story revolves—the Exodus and the Exile—and that once we have these events in proper perspective we have gone far in understanding the Old Testament. In the previous installment I told the story of the Exodus, depicting it as an act of God's grace in that it was something that Israel could not do for itself but that God did for them. It was also an expression of God's grace because it was the beginning of Israel's nationhood, which had to happen before other gracious things happened.

This time around we pass over several centuries to the second most significant event in Israel's history, their deportation to Babylon from their homeland in Palestine, which began in 597 B.C. While it is not specifically so designated in Scripture, it has long been called the Exile, a period of about 70 years, following which the Israelites were liberated from their captivity and returned to their homeland.

This is why we refer to these significant events as "The Exile and the Second Exodus," for just as God's covenant people were once freed from their Egyptian bondage they are this time delivered from their Babylonian captivity. It was a second exodus and another outburst of God's free grace, as we shall see. You can see that we are building a theme in this series: God's grace in the Old Testament.

If the first Exodus (from Egypt) was the beginning of Israel as a nation, the second Exodus (from Babylon) was the reestablishment of Israel as a nation. For the sake of God's long term purposes nationhood had to begin, and once it was interrupted by captivity in Babylon, it had to be put back on track. If Israel would one day give the Christ to the world, they had to be preserved as a nation.

But why an extended sojourn in captivity covering two generations? Why would God impose such a dreadful interval upon His people? The answer is that during those seven long centuries from the time they left Egypt to the time they were threatened by Babylonian conquest a serious problem had developed, one that threatened their existence as God's chosen community. This was the gross and persistent sin of idolatry. If God could not rid them of the practice of turning to other gods and serving them, His purposes would be defeated. So, God turns to a pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar of the Chaldeans, whom the Bible refers to as "the Lord's battle-ax," to burn the idolatry out of them in a foreign land.

It worked, almost to a fault. In pagan Babylon the captive Israelites got their fill of gods and goddesses, idols and idolatry. So much so that once they returned to their homeland they were paranoid about anything even resembling an idol. They eschewed all images, even innocent ones. They not only disallowed images on their coins, documents, and flags, but even their wallpaper could have no design even remotely resembling an image.

So Israel's 70 years in Babylon was a prolonged surgical operation—the excision of its relentless idolatry. The surgery was necessary for its survival as God's covenant people. They could survive with other sins and failures, but not by "gadding about after false gods." Once Israel had paid "double for all her sins," as Is. 40:2 puts it, and returned to Palestine as a pardoned people, she continued to be guilty of sins, but not idolatry. When Jesus came to these people centuries later he found them guilty of many sins, but idolatry was not one of them. Idolatry had to be burned out of them, once and for all. That happened in Babylon and that was the purpose of the Exile, which teaches us a lesson about our own "exiles" of life. We all have an occasional "Babylonian captivity,"perhaps a severe one, that God uses to keep us moving in the right direction.

The reason for the Exile goes back to the reign of Manasseh, who ruled Judah for almost a half century (687-642) and promoted idolatry more than any king before or after him. He set in motion idolatrous forces that could be arrested only by severe measures on God's part. Manasseh "worshipped the whole array of heaven and served it" (2 Kgs. 21:3), practiced soothsaying and magic, and introduced necromancers and wizards, all of which were an abomination to God. While God had said, "Jerusalem is where I will give my name a home," Manasseh built altars to Baal in the Temple of Yahweh.

When the king "led Judah itself into sin with his idols," Yahweh resolved to take drastic action: "Yahweh, the God of Israel, says this, 'Look, I will bring such disaster as to make the ears of all who hear of it tingle" (2 Kgs. 21:12). The disaster referred to was the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and exile in Babylon. Yahweh goes on to say that He was taking such action because Israel had "provoked my anger from the day their ancestors came out of Egypt until now."

An interesting part of this story is the role played by a woman, Huldah the prophetess. When the Book of the Law (Deuteronomy or parts thereof) was discovered in the Temple about this time, during the reform of king Josiah, Israel's leaders did not know what to make of it, so they sent an envoy of five men to this woman prophet to see what Yahweh had to say about it. She spared no words in telling them that it was part of God's judgment:

> Yahweh says this: I am bringing disaster on this place and on those that live in it, carrying out everything said in the book the king of Judah has read, because they have deserted me and sacrificed to other gods. (2 Kgs. 22:16)

That pinpoints the reason for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. It is noteworthy that a woman plays this prophetic role. Five men, including the priest, are sent to a woman to ascertain the will of God! And Huldah does not mince words, speaking for God when He says, "My anger blazes out against this place." If a woman would be used by God for such a significant role on the eve of the Exile, why do we suppose that her ministry must be all that subdued today?

We get the picture of God's distress over Israel's idolatry when we see that King Josiah's reform, significant as it was, did not turn God from His determination to discipline Israel in Babylon. Josiah renewed the covenant with Yahweh, reestablished the Passover that had long been neglected, and he destroyed all the cult objects that had been made for Baal. He did away with all the sacrifices to false gods on the high places, and in general corrected all the evil things done by Manasseh.

Because Josiah had this kind of heart, and because he wept before God over the evil deeds of his people, Huldah assured him that he would be gathered to his ancestors in peace, and "your eyes will not see the disasters that I mean to bring on this place."

Israel's historians gave Josiah high marks: "No king before him had turned to Yahweh as he did, with all his heart, all his soul, all his strength, in perfect loyalty to the Law of Moses; nor was any king like him seen again" (2 Kgs. 23:26). In spite of Josiah's efforts, Yahweh did not turn from His purpose to punish Israel, as the historian notes:

> Yet Yahweh did not renounce the heat of his great anger which blazed out against Judah because of all the provocation Manasseh had offered him, Yahweh decreed: I will thrust Judah away from me too, as I have already thrust Israel; I will cast away Jerusalem, this city I had chosen, and the Temple of which I said: There my name shall be. (2 Kgs. 23:26-27).

If there was an unpardonable sin in the Old Testament it was idolatry. In spite of Josiah's great reformation, the Babylonian captivity had to be, idolatry being the sin that it was. The prophets both before and during the Exile recognized its inevitability. Micah, writing 150 years before, saw what the people's idolatry would lead to. "Jerusalem will be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble," he said in 3:12, and he went on to name Babylon as the place of exile: "To Babylon you must go and there you will be rescued; there Yahweh will ransom you out of the power of your enemies" (4:10).

Isaiah also, a century and a half ahead of time, saw the scourge of Babylon in Israel's future. The prophet told king Hezekiah: "The days are coming when everything in your palace, everything that your ancestors have amassed until now, will be carried off to Babylon. Not a thing will be left" (Is. 39:6). The prophet also told the king that the chosen sons of Judah will be carried away to serve as eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. But neither the king nor the people were bothered by what the prophet had said, for it would be a long time in coming.

The prophet Jeremiah lived closer to the action. He was in fact in Jerusalem when the Babylonians first invaded. For years before the enemy came he pled with the people that it was not too late for them and their city to be spared, if they would but repent of their idolatry. In such pleas as this the prophet seemed to believe the tragedy could be averted:

> For twenty-three years the word of Yahweh has been addressed to me and I have persistently spoken to you, but you have not listened. Furthermore, Yahweh has persistently sent you all his servants the prophets, but you have not listened, or paid attention. The message was this: 'Turn back, each of you, from your evil behavior and your evil actions, and you will stay on the soil Yahweh long ago gave to you and your ancestors for ever. And do not follow alien gods to serve and worship them; do not provoke me by what your own hands have made; then I will not harm you." (Jer. 25:1-6, Jer. Bible).

But the people would not listen to the prophets, so Jeremiah goes on to tell the people that Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, whom he describes as the servant of Yahweh, will come from the north and make them "an object of horror, of scorn, of lasting shame," and take them into slavery for 70 years. But when the 70 years are finished God will bring them back to their homeland. "I will give them a heart to acknowledge that I am Yahweh. They shall be my people and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart" (Jer. 24::7).

Once again we see the grace of God in all this. Even when His people would not listen to the prophets He sent to them, God would not give up on them. It is at this point that Jeremiah gives us one of the greatest lines in all the Bible. He has God saying of His people in captivity, "My eyes will watch over them for their good" (Jer.24:6). We can believe that He also watches over us when the dark clouds of exile come our way. Here we have a good interpretation of Ro. 8:28 where we are promised that in all things God works for our good (my translation!). The captivity for Israel was not good but evil, but God used it for their good. Just so a dreadful disease is evil and not good, but God can and will work in it for good.

After several deportations, beginning in 605 B.C. and ending in 586 B.C. with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, Israel was at last settled in a foreign land as captives. Ancient records indicate that as many as 200,000 were deported, but many were left in Palestine, especially the poor and unskilled. In their exile the Jews enjoyed many privileges. They had their trades and professions, built homes, and even kept servants. Prophets, priests, and teachers were with them, some of whom produced writings that became part of our Bible, such as Ezekiel, (Second) Isaiah, and some of the Psalms.

Most of the people became such a part of the Babylonian way of life they forgot their religion and their traditions, and they lost all interest in returning to Palestine. When the call at last came to the new generation that had been born in Babylon to return home, it was a tiny minority that heeded the call. But God always has His remnant!

Beside the problem of losing their people to the paganism of a foreign land, Israel in captivity had to deal with two other matters that were to affect their ongoing history. The first was that they no longer had their Temple, which was the center of both their religion and their culture. God dwelt with them in the Temple, but the Temple was now destroyed. So, their leaders turned to the study of the Law and emphasized a religion of the heart. Prayer and study were thus stressed, and it is probably in this context that the synagogue arose, a new institution in the history of the Jews which was to playa significant role, as well as “places of prayer.”

The second issue was more theological: Why did God allow the holy city of Jerusalem to be destroyed by pagan armies? The Jews believed God watched over the city and that it was impregnable. Was He unable to save it? Now that both the city and the Temple were gone, why should they hold on to their faith? The exilic prophets answered this by observing that it was not a matter of God’s hand being short that He could not save, but that the people’s sins were so gross that destruction and captivity were necessary to save them from themselves. Besides, Yahweh has a plan for His people. He will once again act in history and bring his people back to the promised land. They therefore must keep their faith alive.

In 539 B.C. Babylon fell into the hands of Cyrus the Great of Persia. Even though he was a pagan king the Bible refers to him as “the anointed of the Lord,” for it was he who issued the decree that brought the Jews back to Palestine. In 538 B.C. under Cyrus’ edict 43,000 of them returned home and soon rebuilt their Temple and reestablished Judaism.

Yahweh had his prophet there, assuring them that He was with them and that He would give them the strength for the journey home: “‘Comfort, yes, comfort My people,’ says your God. ‘Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her that her warfare is ended,

that her iniquity is pardoned'" (Is. 40:1-1). Then comes one of the great passages of the Bible, assuring the Jews that they would have the strength to respond to freedom's call:

> Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (Is. 40:31).

In the next installment we will look at the Exilic prophets and see how they preached Good News to a people in bondage.—*the Editor*

> Man looks forward with smiles, but backward with sighs. Such is the wise providence of God. The cup of life is sweetness at the brim—the flavor is impaired as we drink deeper, and the dregs are made bitter that we may not struggle when it is taken from our lips.—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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A PLEA FOR RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM

There is an article in the May issue of *Firm Foundation*, a Church of Christ publication out of Houston, entitled "A Journey Into A 'Far Country'," that leads me to issue a call for more responsible Christian journalism. It is an account of a Church of Christ minister's journey among Independent Christian Churches,' which he describes as a far country. He confesses to the "faithful" brethren that he has been a prodigal and wants to come back home.

If a brother chooses to leave the Church of Christ and work among the Christian Churches, it is of course his and their business, and we should respect it as such. And if he then decides he wants to "come back home" to the Church of Christ that too is for him to decide, and it is not for us to judge him in the matter. We can of course raise a question about where "home" should be. Should not Jesus Christ always be our home, wherever we may be assembling? We should not be "leaving home" when we move from one Christian assembly to another.

So, such a "journey" as the brother describes is in itself understandable, but the things that he says in telling his story is as irresponsible as anything I ever recall reading. If the author of the piece is to be blamed for writing it, the editor of the *Firm Foundation* is to be blamed even more for publishing it. I question it because it makes ridiculous and

irresponsible charges against our sisters and brothers in the Christian Church. The article falls so short of the common courtesy that should be shown in Christian papers that it might be ignored, but it gives one editor, myself, an occasion to plead with another editor, the *Firm Foundation* editor, that we give all diligence to pursue the things that make for peace and unity, especially at a time when serious efforts are being made for better understanding between Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. There are times when an editor should return a manuscript with an attending note, “The way this reads it will do more harm than good. Rewrite it!”

It is incredible that an editor would allow such a judgment as this to appear in his paper: “There is no way that one who wants to be true to God’s Word (and I do) can be in fellowship with the Independent Christian Church.” This does not merely say that those in the Christian Church may be in error about some things, but that they do not even want to be true to God’s word! They are not only wrong but are insincere in their profession to follow Christ! I am ashamed that any paper among us would allow such an abusive statement to appear in its columns. Such an ungracious and unkind spirit only drives the wedge of division deeper.

It gets worse as the author gives his reasons for such a judgment. He can’t fellowship the Christian Church anymore because they worship Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny! Some congregation must have had a Christmas party and some kids must have gone on an Easter egg hunt. Big deal! That’s worshipping Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny! In the face of such nonsense as that is there any wonder that we are losing our young people? Do we in the Church of Christ worship the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus when we take our kids on an egg hunt and exchange gifts at Christmas? Should not Christian love temper such a wild judgment of others as that?

Then comes the old bromide that Church of Christ leaders have been feeding us ever since our break with the Christian Churches a century ago: “I was out of place among people who really do not give much thought to Bible authority.” The Church of Christ honors the authority of the Bible while the Christian Church does not—all because they use instruments of music, concerning which the Bible is silent, and we don’t! If that reasoning holds up, what are we to say when our non-Sunday School brothers say that they accept biblical authority while we don’t—since we have the Sunday School, concerning which the Bible is silent, and they don’t?

Can’t people who respect biblical authority sincerely differ with each other? It is not only ungracious but comes close to being self-righteous when we accuse others of not respecting the Bible because they do not reach the same conclusions that we do, especially in areas where God does not speak.

I am probably as well acquainted with Christian Churches as anyone among Churches of Christ, and my impression is that they esteem the Scriptures the same as we do. All our people in the Stone-Campbell Movement have made the Bible basic to our faith throughout our history with such mottoes as, "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible." We all believe that. And yet we've never seen the Bible eye-to-eye on every point. That doesn't mean that part of us disregards biblical authority, but only that we disagree on what the Bible teaches. God calls us to disagree agreeably and lovingly when we have to disagree, but we have not always heeded that call.

There is a frightening implication in part of what this *Firm Foundation* article says. The author names all sorts of "erroneous ideas and teachings" that he found in the Christian Church, such as salvation by grace only, baptism (one does not have to understand that it is for the remission of sins), premillennialism, the role of women, divorce and remarriage, qualification of elders, the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The frightening implication is that we have to see all these questions and issues alike. If there is diversity of opinion, one must leave, as the author did the Christian Church, and find conformity in a "sound" church.

Our brother is not going to find any group of believers that sees all such issues alike, including the kind of Church of Christ to which he returns. The *Firm Foundation* itself started as a faction over one issue that he names—whether one has to understand that baptism is for the remission of sins for it to be valid—and it was an issue within Churches of Christ rather than Christian Churches. None other than the revered David Lipscomb taught, as did Alexander Campbell before him, that baptism is predicated upon faith, not knowledge. This is why Lipscomb and Campbell took people in on their "Baptist baptism."

Our people never reimmersed Baptists until Austin McGary, who was both a sheriff and a preacher in Texas, started rebaptizing as many Church of Christ members as he could persuade back in the 1880's, insisting that they had to know that baptism was for the remission of sins, and started his own paper to support his cause. This not only led to an ongoing controversy between McGary of the *Firm Foundation* and Lipscomb of the *Gospel Advocate*, but was the root cause of a feud between our Texas and Tennessee churches that has not fully abated until this day.

I say it is a frightening prospect to insist that we have to agree on such matters as the millennium, the role of women, divorce and remarriage, and all such issues because we would be a dull and sterile people, afraid to think and unable to grow. We need honest differences and the freedom to explore new ideas—to question, to challenge, to sharpen each other in a spirit of love and acceptance.

Since we will see things differently (period!) our choice is clear-cut. We can demand conformity and stifle thought and thus consign ourselves to the fate of being a narrow, bigoted party. Or we can accept diversity (in all of life as well as in the church) as a blessing to be used in glorifying God by cultivating a reconciled diversity. This we do by loving and accepting one another even as Christ loves and accepts us, even when we are wrong.

This does not mean that diversity has no limits, for in matters that are basic and essential we will be of "one heart and one mind" and will "speak the same things" as the Scriptures teach. We will thus not only allow but encourage liberty of opinion. Only one rule is imperative, that we not be pushy about our opinions nor make them tests of fellowship.

So, we have no more reason to quarrel with our brothers and sisters in the Christian Churches as we have to quarrel with each other. We are not each other's enemy. We rather have a common enemy—one who is effectively at work in this world that we live in together. If we put on the whole armor of God and rally our forces against him and all his strongholds, we will have neither time nor incentive to fight each other.

I might say in closing that I have to assume some responsibility for our brothers prodigal journey to the Christian Church and back, for in said article he attributes his difficulties to "reading too much Restoration Review, One Body, and similar liberal ilk, and not enough Bible." To this I can only say that it is my prayer that whatever he reads he will be led to keep it straight who the enemy is. When he was with the Christian Churches the enemy was not the Churches of Christ, and now that he is back with Churches of Christ the enemy is not the Christian Churches. He says he needs to read the Bible more. Well and good, but lest we forget we have lots of folk who read nothing but the Bible, and when at last they put on the whole armor of God and come out raring to fight. *It is their own sisters and brothers in Christ that they want to fight rather than the Old Deceiver himself!*

Let us be up and at him, not each other! We will look to the *Firm Foundation* to stand with us in this appeal.—*the Editor*

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We Must Learn Who the Enemy Is. . .

WHAT MUST THE CHURCH OF CHRIST DO TO BE SAVED? (6)

We've all heard those sermons on how the church is like an army, and we teach our kids to sing *We're in the Lords Army.* According to this imagery we are all Christian soldiers and Jesus is our Captain. We are to put on "the whole armor of God" which is described in detail in Eph. 6. The warrior's gear is all there: loins girded with truth; a breastplate of righteousness; feet shod with the gospel; the shield of faith; the helmet of salvation; the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

There is no question but what one is well armed for battle when he has on such an armor. The Bible describes such a one as "a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:2). A good soldier is not only properly geared but he has the spirit of a fighter. As Paul looked back over his life he said he had not only kept the faith and finished the race, but "I have fought the good fight" (2 Tim. 4:7).

But who is the enemy? Who is it or what is it that we are to fight?

In this installment I am saying that if the Church of Christ is to be saved it must find out who the real enemy is. One only needs to read our church papers to see that for the most part we are fighting each other. Or if one listens to a lot of our sermons and reads our tracts he may conclude that "the denominations" are the enemy. Or if our argumentative spirit is not satisfied in any other way it is some "straw man" that is the enemy. Then there is the long history of our debates. We started out debating "the sects." When they would no longer debate us we started debating one another.

The lectureship audience at Abilene Christian University for 1991 was reminded of all this in a discourse by Jim Woodroof of Searcy, Arkansas. He tells of Gayle Erwin, author of *The Jesus Style.* being a guest in his home. Since Gayle was "not a member of our movement," as Jim put it, Jim's wife Louine asked him if he had ever known anyone in the Church of Christ before he met them. His answer was yes, but he said no more. There was a long pause. "Well?," asked Louine, pressing him to say more. At last he said, a bit embarrassed, "Well, I wondered, 'What on earth did they put in that water?' Because, everyone of you I have ever met had always come up out of the water arguing." Jim added an understatement, "We have not been known as peacemakers." He could have said that we've never known who the real enemy is.

I will be the first to confess that I was sometime learning what the Scriptures clearly taught all along, that "We do not wrestle with flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12). Other people are not the enemy. But I learned from my teachers in Church of Christ colleges that it was the Baptists and Methodists who were the enemy, along with the rest of the denominations.

If there was an arch-enemy it was the Roman Catholics, particularly the pope. So, I was well armed for such "wrestling," or so I supposed, having been taught by no less a luminary than N. B. Hardeman himself, who was president of a college that bore his name.

In those early years brother Hardeman was both my hero and my model, for he was a debater as well as a tabernacle revivalist, probably preaching to more people than any man in the history of the Church of Christ. He both debated and preached before thousands. In his classes we studied his debates, which included skirmishes with Christian Church ministers on instrumental music and with Baptists on baptism and apostasy.

One such book that we studied was the Hardeman-Bogard debate, and with brother Hardeman himself as the teacher I got the distinct impression that our man, who was the true soldier in the contest, got the best of the other guy, who was the enemy. It never occurred to me that Ben Bogard was as much my brother in Christ as was N. B. Hardeman. I sometimes wonder how I would have responded if some wise person, like Hardeman himself, had pointed that out to me.

If N. B. H., as he was often called, had said to us, "Now, boys, you understand that Ben Bogard is also a Christian. We differ on some things, as you can see, but we love and accept each other as brothers in Christ nonetheless." If he had said that and meant it, I might have been confused for a time, but I believe I would have listened—and how liberating that would have been!

If Hardeman could have said, "Boys, maybe this debate should never have been held, for it set us against each other as enemies when in fact we were brothers. The differences may not be all that important after all," I am confident it would have changed my life. It would have also changed brother Hardeman's life!

I recall that it appeared odd to me that Ben Bogard was teaching the same debate book to his students in Arkansas, and he advertised the book with more zeal than did brother Hardeman! And of course at the Baptist school Bogard was the true soldier and Hardeman the enemy!

Our big debates through the years have not been as "our sided" as we suppose, including those that go back to Alexander Campbell himself. I recall one faithful "Campbellite" with a critical eye for distinctions challenging the readers of the Campbell-Rice debate to place what the two men said on the design of baptism side-by-side and identify any significant difference. Rice was a Presbyterian who did quite well for himself in that debate. You might try it for yourself. You may agree that whatever differences there may have been did not call for a big debate where the contestants confronted each other as adversaries instead of brothers in Christ who "love one another fervently from the heart."

It wasn't long until I myself was debating Baptists, and afterwards with my own people in the Church of Christ. We all donned the armor of God and took in hand the sword of the Spirit, and came out flaying away at the enemy—each other! We didn't know who the real enemy was!

I can't blame my early teachers for all this, for I was responsible to think for myself. I have only myself to blame for the years that I was a sectarian. My teachers in those early days did me far more good than they did harm, and I've always loved them for that. Beside, now and again they pointed in a different direction, if I had only known how to follow through. Brother Hardeman, for example, told us in class one day that he believed that his pious Methodist mother died a Christian and that he expected to see her in heaven. "She followed Christ the best she knew how," he told us.

We preacher boys were not into it enough to ask, "Then, brother Hardeman, all those who are following Christ the best they know how are Christians even if they are mistaken about baptism?" If brother Hardeman could have himself followed through on that and made it clear to us that it is not the Methodists that we were to fight when we departed from the sacred confines of his college, it would have made a difference in the kind of preachers we all became.

I would one day learn that the definition Hardeman gave for a Christian—one who is following Christ the best she knows how—is almost word-for-word the definition Alexander Campbell gave over a century before, and that our pioneers were not confused as to who the enemy is, like we are in the Church of Christ. I came to appreciate that old motto that our pioneers handed down to us, "We are Christians only, but not the only Christians." But at Freed-Hardeman College I learned it the other way, that we in the Church of Christ are the only Christians—except for brother Hardeman's mother! All others are the enemy!

The good news in all this is that not only I but thousands of others in the Church of Christ are discovering who the real enemy is. But we yet have a long way to go.

We are learning who the real enemy is because he has captured our kids with drugs and poisoned their minds with pornography. He gets them drunk and slaughters them on our highways. He kills millions of them before they are ever born. He wrecks their homes and breaks up their marriages. He gets us into wars that should never have been fought. He blights our minds with ignorance, racism, pride, and all sorts of godless philosophies, from New Ageism and Occultism to scientism or consumerism.

Tragedy around the world makes it clear who the enemy is. There is civil war in Afghanistan, mass starvation in Ethiopia and Bangledash, and terrorism in South Africa. In Yugoslavia Serbs and Croates are fighting each other, in India it is Muslims and Hindus, and in North Ireland it is Catholics and Protestants. In Third World nations most people live below the poverty line and suffer gross inequities. We all have a common enemy, whom Luther described as “armed with cruel hate,” who is at work the world over seeking to do us in.

When we recognize our common enemy we can rejoice when he suffers a major defeat as in the demise of atheistic Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe. Millions of Christians were persecuted by the atheistic regime in the Soviet Union, Bibles were outlawed, and thousands of churches closed. Today we have a Church of Christ in Moscow distributing Bibles and the old Orthodox churches are reopening. But it is Communism that was the enemy, not our sisters and brothers in other churches who had to suffer for their faith.

I am well aware that our enemy, whom Rev. 12:10 describes as “the accuser of our brethren” (and that is not just Church of Christ folk!) is at work among all the churches as well as in all the world. He in fact disguises himself as “an angel of light” and invades our pulpits, board rooms, classrooms, and even the editor’s desk. He is pictured in the Bible as a roaring lion seeking to devour whom he may. But let all believers unite their energies and fight “the Adversary ,” and cease fighting one another.

If we are confused as to who the enemy is and start taking it out on each other, it helps some to realize that our Lord’s own disciples had the same problem. They came upon someone who was casting out demons in the name of Christ “who does not follow us,” and so they forbade him. When they told Jesus about this, he did not approve of their action, saying to them, “He who is not against us is on our side” (Mk. 9:38-40). The disciples didn’t know who the enemy was, but Jesus made it clear for them and for us all. The enemy is anyone or any thing that is against Christ and opposes his work. This does not include other believers who are simply mistaken on some points of doctrine or practice. Such ones often love Jesus more than we do and make great sacrifices to support his cause. They certainly are not against him.

So Jesus tells us what I John 4:3 tells us: the enemy is “the spirit of Antichrist,” all those people, things, and forces that are against Christ and his church. And we are told that there are many anti-christs in the world (l Jn. 2:18). So we have plenty of enemies to fight without fighting each other. In fact, once we tangle with the real enemy, such as racial injustice, the party spirit, or drug addiction we are grateful to get all the help we can, even if they are “not of us.”

Once we see that we are at war with the anti-christs and not with each other or our neighbors who are "following Christ the best they know how," to quote brother Hardeman again, some great things will begin to happen. Our wrestling is "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

When we in Churches of Christ realize the enormity of our warfare, that we are in a crucible with cosmic evil, and overcome the mentality that fellow believers are enemies because they are "not of us," we will be saved for a glorious and fruitful ministry.—*the Editor*

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BIRDIE DIES AT 108

She came to my hometown of Denton, Texas before I was born, and she eventually attained some degree of notoriety for her longevity. For several years she got her picture in our local paper for being the oldest person in our county. When she recently died at 108 her picture not only appeared once more but there was an extensive writeup as well. That is because Birdie Washington, a black woman, did more than simply survive in this troubled world for 108 years, though that is no mean accomplishment.

When her story appeared in the paper I decided that I would attend her funeral, even though I had never met her. I was impressed that while she outlived her husband and all of her four children she was survived by 13 grandchildren, 31 great-grandchildren, and 10 great-great grandchildren. I wanted to look in on such a funeral as that, and I was hopeful of talking to some of them about what they had learned from her. Besides, we should all attend a black person's funeral now and again, for where else will one hear the old spiritual "Walking Around Heaven All Day." It does something to your innards.

I have visited every black church in Denton and I always found myself the only white person present, which is of course all right with me, except that it is a grim reminder of how segregated our society is. Since Birdie had lived among us for so long I supposed that the service this time would be integrated, but again, except for a white woman who had married into a black family, I was the only white person in the packed church.

Birdie left us in style, all first class. Not only were there beautiful flowers, but her small, frail form rested in a pure white stainless steel casket. As they say, she was put away nice. Back when she worked as a farm hand for $5.00 a week she could hardly have dreamed of ever faring so well.

The reverend pastor spoke briefly, as requested by “the worn out family,” on the brevity of life. Even Methuselah who lived 969 years, he noted, finally “had to get out of here.” Using a biblical metaphor in an unusual way, he pointed out that all of us who live in this world, whether few or many years, will one day hear the trumpet and will have to “get out of here.” Birdie Washington, at 108, which he thought was a long time, at last heard the trumpet. Now she’s “walking around heaven all day.”

I thought more could have been said about what Birdie’s life says to our drug-addicted, dope-peddling, crime-ridden, welfare-oriented society, which was probably well-represented in the assembled mourners. Birdie lived in a day when the poor had no choice but to work. She arrived in Denton by train with only one possession of any real value, a big horse, which she traded in as a down payment on a little home. She paid the mortgage by picking cotton in the fields that were abundant in Denton county when she was a young woman. She eventually became a capitalist, buying property next to her and renting it.

U sing a wooden box as a cradle for her baby, she would nail it to the trunk of a tree while she worked in the field and her other children played beneath the tree. When the baby needed her, the family’s trained dog would pull it to her in a little wagon. Birdie of course knew the pain of being black in a white person’s world. She could not attend the “good” school with little white girls, nor drink from the same fountain or even go to the same toilet. She was delighted to play with the white girls’ throw-away dolls. She was an old woman before she ever dared to enter a white man’s restaurant or call at a white family’s front door. So she never got much of that kind of thing done. She grew up with no illusion that she was anything more than a second-class citizen, “a Negro” (when folk were nice to her) that hardly counted at all. In her day she was not even “a black,” and civil rights was not even a dream. She learned to survive by working for the white folks and otherwise staying out of their way. She wasn’t interested in handouts. She at last owned two houses side by side!

Her’s was a simple philosophy. Work hard, mind your business, and look to the good Lord. Early on she joined the Church of God in Christ, and it was at this church that her home going was celebrated. Jesus was her Lord, the church her larger family, and faith her victory. When I asked one of her clan what she would remember most about Birdie, the answer was that she was always kind and generous. Another referred to the joy in her life. Hard work, kindly deeds, joyous living all add up to 108 years.

They say Birdie is now walking around heaven all day. Unlike Denton, Texas, heaven we may assume is everywhere integrated. Birdie doesn’t have to call at nobody’s back door no more.—*the Editor*

The unexamined life is not worth living.—*Socrates*

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THE TRUTH THAT FREES

Cecil Hook

Jesus told his followers, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn. 8:32). What is that liberating truth? Is it the Bible? Is it the New Testament writings? Is it just the gospel? Is it simply the “plan of salvation”? Is it Christ’s law?

It is none of the above! Although the Bible is true, Jesus was not pointing them to a book to be written and compiled at some time in the future. Jesus was not talking about a set of facts, a code of law, or a system of doctrine; he had only one truth in mind.

And from what would the truth free them?

In order to find the answer to these questions, one need not belabor himself with commentaries, lexicons, and the deliberations of the scholars. A reading of the context of this much-quoted passage, which includes the second quadrant of the gospel of John, can give us the simple answer. Let us scan it briefly to see.

Jesus was going about teaching and performing miracles in order to create faith that he was the Son of God, yet he was being cautious not to arouse a peak of opposition before his hour should come. As Jesus was gaining public attention and popularity among the people, the chief priests and Pharisees were stirring up opposition. In the setting of John 7-8, we see the controversy intensify. Jesus testified of his relation to the Father who sent him. He was to identify himself as the Savior: “I told you that you would die in your sins unless you believe that I am he” (Jn. 8:24). They would be in bondage to their sins as long as they did not believe “I am he”—that is, that he was the Christ sent from God.

Although Jesus had done many convincing works among them, he had not given the ultimate demonstration of his Sonship. So he also declared, “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will *know* that *I am he*” (8:28).

What is the *truth* that they would know? It was the answer to the great controversy—whether he was the Christ sent from the Father. The uplifted Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4). In a short time, both believers and those who opposed would be able to know that liberating truth.

When those disciples heard him speak of their being set free, they protested that they had never been in bondage. Then Jesus made it clear that it was their bondage to sin that would be relieved. The whole world still awaited an atonement.

It should be noted that Jesus stated positively and without condition that "you *will know"* and "the truth *will make* you free." The disciples were Jewish law-keepers who already believed in Jesus. This promise applied to them uniquely and was fulfilled in that they became witnesses of the resurrection which enabled them to know that he was the Son of God and they were freed from sin without further condition because "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to *redeem those who were under the law. . .*" (Gal.4:4).

A voiding any hint that he was speaking of a body of teaching instead of himself as a person, Jesus assured the disciples, "So if the Son make you free, you will be free indeed" (8:36). He is the Truth who frees. A code of law, factual truths, defined doctrines, and rules of conduct have no power to break the bondage of sin, and no complicated system of either of these must be mastered in order for one to gain his forgiveness.

We, too, are enabled to *know* the *Truth* and to be freed by him, for later in his prayer Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent" (17:3).

While we are brought to the liberating Jesus by the gospel and we are directed in the exercise of freedom in him by the apostolic teachings, it is to the Son of God rather than to a system of true teachings that we owe our freedom from both sin and law.

If we must know and understand all facts recorded in the Bible, we are hopeless. I have quoted "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" many times, thinking that I had a system of truth fairly well defined. I was trying to convert others to a body of truth or system of doctrine more than to Christ. Often addressing those who already believed in Jesus, I sought to convince them of a code of law which I thought they had failed to recognize and understand.

But I was the one who needed more insight. Jesus rebuked me along with others like me in his day when he said: "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness of me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (Jn. 5:39).

In a related but secondary sense, they were unconditionally freed from the slavery to law. Law and sin are closely related, for it is law that brings sin. While law brings sin, it has no remedy to free those under its dominion.

To impose a system of teaching as a code of law is to enslave rather than to free. Law is “a yoke under the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10). Jesus brought freedom from both law and its consequential sin, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

I have often declared that truth frees us and that error cannot do what truth does. In some sense that is true, but I was setting error as the opposite of truth, while Satan is the opposite of Truth—one personage opposing another. When I am in Christ, I am in the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and Satan cannot snatch me out of his hand.

The truth that frees us from sin is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.—*1350 Huisache. New Braunfels. Tx. 78130*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Ouida is now completely recovered from her recent illness, but the cardinals that I told about last month, who built their nest at our kitchen window, did not fair so well. In spite of prolonged attention the eggs never hatched, except for one that did not live. Ouida was disappointed. It looks as if we are in for a long, hot summer in Texas, and I will be home most of the time helping Ouida take care of Mother Pitts and catching up on work that has stacked up. So, we’ll likely be home if you find yourself coming this way . You will remember that we do not publish in July or August, so we will see you in our September number.

A Roman Catholic source supplies this interesting information: The largest church in the U.S. is the Roman Catholic; the second largest is not the Southern Baptist but fallen-away Catholics. There are 15 million Roman Catholics in this country that have “fallen through the cracks” in one way or another. Those who keep tabs of Church of Christ numbers tell us that in any typical city where we are considered strong we have as many people or perhaps more that have left us or are “out of duty” than are in regular attendance.

It looks like both Roman Catholics and Churches of Christ have their work cut out for them. It would make an interesting study to determine why so many leave from both churches. I am suspicious that the reasons might be similar.

One of our Church of Christ bulletins tells a story that should make anyone's "church jokes" list. When a lady came forward to be baptized she was handed a card to fill out. The preacher noticed that she appeared puzzled, only to learn that he had handed her the wrong card, which was an application for a summer camp. The first question on the card handed her was, "Can you swim?"

Bob Cannon, an Assemblies of God minister who was once with Churches of Christ, sends this report about his mission congregation in Oracle, Arizona: "We baptized three precious souls this past Lord's Day. We brought a water tank (for cattle) into the building. The water was a bit cold. The congregation loved it. They never had seen anything like it before."

Norman Lear, producer of such TV hits as "All in the Family", premiers a new show on June 2 on CBS that is certain to be controversial. It makes TV history in that it deals with a no-no for the industry: it brings up religion. Lear believes people have a hunger for the transcendent, and he hopes to stimulate discussion about things outside and higher than ourselves. He wants to promote such values as awe, goodness, kind-ness, and morality. But he has his critics, including the Rev. Donald Wildmon and his American Family Association, who have called for a boycott of the show's sponsors. Wildmon says the show will be anti-Christian. He also charges that it trivializes God, with characters addressing the Deity as "He" or"She" or" Someone" or "Chief." Wildmon also charges that the program will promote New Ageism. Lear, who denies being "a New Age fanatic" and describes himself as "a level-headed, common-sensical lifetime explorer," has not, to say the least, established himself in the public eye as religious.

The Institute For Christian Studies in Austin, Tx. has moved into an impressive new facility that houses classrooms, offices, and library. The Institute is a college of Bible and religion that offers two bachelor degrees in Biblical studies. It is adjacent to the University Church of Christ, whose elders are trustees. Near the University of Texas, it provides programs in biblical studies within a university setting. Since its inception in 1964 more than 10,000 university students have taken courses at the Institute.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

You may not remember me, but one of your readers found it completely unacceptable that I had joined the Mormons, so she brought me to you. After reading Ropp's book that you gave me, I confronted the Mormon bishop. He could not explain the changes in their doctrine that they called "God's Word." That was about 10 years ago. Thank you again.—*Bob Spellmann, Roanoke, Tx.*

(The book I would now recommend for someone caught up in Mormonism would be Charles Crane's *The Bible and the Mormon Scriptures,* which we can send to you for $5.00 postpaid.—*Ed.*)

Your courtesy and charity to me has been touching. I have been battered and bruised by more than one "Campbellite" preacher of the hard line variety. Once I attended a religious brawl where two of them were going at me at once (all taped for dubious purposes), and I still have vivid memories of that one. When I was a youngster, my dear parents brought Church of Christ preachers to our home for those great meals, especially when there was a Gospel Meeting. Our local minister was a gentleman of great sincerity and holiness of life. I have fond memories of him and still remember snips of his good sermons. I sometimes visit his grave, which is near the grave of my dear father. He was John B. Hardeman, and I think he was kin to N.B. Hardeman. My father took us to the 9th Street Church of Christ in Mayfield, Ky. My mother was a Baptist but joined the Church of Christ several years after marriage. I became interested in the Catholic Faith at age 14 and entered formally at age 17. Early on I felt drawn to the priesthood. My mother now lives alone and is 92. She still drives her car and goes regularly to the College Street Church of Christ in Mayfield. My priestly vocation was aroused and fed by the great preaching in the Church of Christ. Were they ever good! I still recall some of the points and when I compare them to our Catholic beliefs they converge more than diverge.—*Rev. Benjamin Luther, Paducah, Ky.*

(This is but part of a great letter I received from a new friend. We found each other because we both are part of God's remnant. He sends me important data on what is going on in the Roman Catholic world. I share part of him with you because Church of Christ-Christian Church folk seldom read letters by a Catholic priest, especially one brought up in the Church of Christ! I am impressed by the way he can take the good and the bad from his background and treat them alike. Are ex-Catholics among us equally gracious? I kid him about being a Lutheran all his life! He tells me that his name, along with his Catholic collar, raises eyebrows in some circles! And can you believe, as he does, that we agree more than we disagree? We start with a common faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, which is the only creed the earliest Christians had. Not a bad start!—*Ed.*)

The Spirit is moving among Churches of Christ, the winds of change are blowing. I hope it is not to late.—*Tony Thompson, Murray, Ky.*

I believe that unless Churches of Christ undergo a massive transformation our movement will die.—*a sister in Christ, Edmond, Ok.*

I'm very encouraged about the changes taking place in the whole Church of Christ. You deserve a lot of credit for it. The 1990 theme at the Tulsa Workshop was unity, and there were some fine sermons, things I thought I'd never hear expressed among us. They were like water to my thirsty soul.—*Edythe Lane, Wynne, Ar.*

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BOOK NOTES

We are pleased that there is a greater demand for our back issues. Perhaps that is because we cease publication with our December 1992 issue. We have well over 100 back issues available, dating back almost 30 years. As long as they are available we are letting these go at 40 cents each plus postage. Or you can order 15 back issues for $4.00 or 25 back issues for $6.00, postpaid, when selected at random by us.

Along with our latest bound volume, *The Hope of the Believer,* which is all the issues for 1989-90 ($15.00), we have six other bound volumes, going back to 1977, except for 1979-80. You can get all seven volumes at a discount rate of $70.00 postpaid.

Biography is an excellent way to study history, including Restoration history. We recommend two historical novels that will give you the spirit of our Movement as well as the facts. *Raccoon John Smith* and *The Fool of God* are both by Louis Cochran, and they make for exciting reading. The first is $11.75, postpaid, and the second, which is on the life of Alexander Campbell, is $12.75, postpaid.

A veritable goldmine of information is F. F. Bruce's *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free.* It is a kind of library on Paul in one volume. His chapter on "Man of Vision and Man of Action" will impress you, as will the entire book of over 500 pages. $22.95 postpaid.

A short history of Disciples of Christ! Christian Churches/Churches of Christ (only 263 pages) by Louis Cochran is not as widely known as it should be. It is appropriately titled *Captives of the Word* and sells for $13.50 postpaid.

In our last number we had an article on the way Homer Hailey, now 86, has been treated because of positions taken in his *The Divorced and Remarried Who Would Come to God.* Since it is a more open view than that taken by most of the leaders of the conservative Churches of Christ, they have been giving him a hard time, which he takes without bitterness. We believe he has the right to be heard, and we will send you a copy for $5 .50 postpaid.

The editor will give the Dean Walker Lecture for the European Evangelistic Society breakfast meeting on July 11 at the North American Christian Convention in Denver. The subject is "A Preface to Alexander Campbell."

This journal is not published in July and August. The next issue will be September.

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